



Expo spreads the word on alternative energy

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Discovering and embracing ways to avoid using imported fossil fuels is a hot topic in Tucson.

The first 90 minutes of Friday's Alternative Energy Expo, which continues Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Tucson Convention Center, attracted more than 500 people who learned about solar devices, energy-efficient lighting, alt-fuel vehicles and other energy-saving topics.

An Alternative Energy Forum held earlier Friday attracted 70 community, government and business leaders who strategized on making sustainable energy a reality.

Joseph Orr, 7, a student at Family Life Academy at Christ Community Church, said he is concerned about the environment.

He said burning coal to produce electricity makes smoke and solar offers a cleaner way to generate power.

"We have to keep our world clean," Orr said as he roamed the aisles of the Expo on Friday afternoon visiting exhibits. "We need plants and animals to live."

Bob Lamb was interested in a solar water heater display.

He said the Expo attendance shows a strong public interest in alternative energy sources.

"This is all very interesting and I think it will really catch on," Lamb said.

At the forum, at the Arizona Inn, experts warned that our dependence on foreign oil coming from unfriendly, unreliable sources means we need to develop new sources of energy.

The United States uses 20 million barrels of oil per day, or 25 percent of the world's consumption, said Gerry Harrow of the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo.

Transportation makes up 68 percent of U.S. consumption.

Other nations, such as China, are cranking up energy use while world oil production is dropping, Harrow said.

The U.S. now depends heavily on imports.

"If they shut the valve we would run out in 53 days," he said.

Commissioner Kris Mayes of the Arizona Corporation Commission, which oversees regulated utilities, said the ACC's rules requiring utilities such as Tucson Electric Power Co. to generate 15 percent of the power they sell from renewables by 2025 will boost solar, wind and other alternative energy sources, up from the current 1.1 percent standard.

U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., who released a report on solar energy in southern Arizona on Friday said, "The stage is set to take it to the next level."

She said renewable implementation means economic benefits.

Implementing the increase in the ACC's renewable standard to 15 percent by 2025 will create 24,000 new jobs in the state and add \$12 billion to the gross state product, Giffords said.

Giffords said that solar incentives and programs, research and development and education are needed to make the region "Solarcon Valley."

"We have a road map now," Giffords said. "I'm optimistic and energized. Southern Arizona has the land, the sun, and innovation at the University of Arizona and in industry. We can do this."

But the best strategy is conservation, said Dudley Sondenno of Southwest Gas Corp.

"The best way is not having to produce that unit of energy at all," Sondenno said. "We have to make sure we use the energy as efficiently as possible to do the work in office or home," he said.